

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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### INTERIOR TO PROPOSE LIFTING BAN ON COMMERCIAL IMPORTS OF KANGAROOS

The five-year ban on commercial imports of kangaroos and kangaroo products would be lifted for a two-year trial period under a proposed rulemaking to be published next week in the Federal Register, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Robert L. Herbst announced today.

The proposed action is based on a review of recently obtained data and information indicating the animal is much more numerous than previously believed, along with an improved management program for Australia's estimated 32 million kangaroos. "If the ban is lifted following a 30-day comment period and review, a careful and continuous monitoring would be carried out during the two-year period," Herbst said. The ban could be reimposed at any time if problems occur, such as drought.

The ban was imposed in December 1974 when three kangaroo species--the red, the eastern gray, and the western gray--were listed as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act. All commercial importations into this country were prohibited until a satisfactory management program was implemented in Australia to control commercial trade in kangaroo hides. Prior to the import ban, the United States was among the largest importers of the hides, which are used by the leather goods industry for such items as boots, shoes, bags, belts, and other luxury items.

"Australian wildlife officials have made great strides in the last 5 years in instituting procedures to protect the kangaroo from overexploitation," said Herbst. "They have carefully established harvest quotas and a coordinated interstate system of tagging to insure against illegal trade, licensing of all professional hunters and processors, a monthly report requirement, and oversight of the entire process by both the State and National Government."

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Earlier this year the Australian Government requested that a biologist from the United States visit Australia to examine the kangaroo situation first hand. Dr. David Anderson, Leader of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Utah Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, traveled in Australia and submitted a lengthy report. The report resolved many of the concerns Fish and Wildlife Service biologists had about the species.

Prior to Dr. Anderson's report, the only large-scale, scientifically compiled estimate of kangaroo numbers available to the Fish and Wildlife Service was a published figure of about 3.6 million red and gray kangaroos on the plains of New South Wales. Dr. Anderson's report, however, lists almost 32 million kangaroos, including 5 million in New South Wales. He found that each of the four Australian States where kangaroos exist in major numbers had a good program for the sustained management of the 200-pound animals. His report suggests that the number of kangaroos currently being taken is substantially below a harvest that would be detrimental to overall populations.

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"Year of the Coast"